



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR
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December 3, 2015

Margaret Forgione
Manhattan Borough Commissioner
NYC Department of Transportation
59 Maiden Lane, 35th Floor
New York, NY 10038

RE: 6th Avenue Bicycle Lane (West 14th Street to West 33rd Street)

Dear Ms. Forgione:

Manhattan Community Board 4 appreciates the NYC Department of Transportation proposal, in response to requests from MCB's 2, 4 and 5, to install a parking protected bicycle lane on 6th Avenue between West 14th and West 33rd Street. We understand this proposal is part of NYC DOT's effort to create an expanded network of protected bicycle lanes to enhance safety and achieve the goals of the Mayor's Vision Zero initiative. However, the plan, as currently envisioned, does not include crucial elements that would better ensure pedestrian, bicyclist and vehicular safety. More specifically, the proposal does not, but should, include 1) split phase turn signals at all left turn intersections, 2) separate rather than the proposed "mixed" vehicle and bicycle lane areas at vehicle turning areas, and 3) raised and/or planted pedestrian refuge areas at least 6' wide. In addition, we are concerned that DOT has not begun to speak with the retail businesses on 6th Avenue before adopting this plan. We are pleased that NYC DOT has agreed to look into including these elements and will return to the CB4 Transportation Committee in January with a revised plan.

Manhattan Community Board 4 has been one of the earliest and strongest proponents of parking protected bicycle lanes. We are pleased that the success of protected bicycle lanes has resulted in a 20% reduction in crash injuries on 8th Avenue and a 43% reduction on 9th Avenue. The increased safety results mainly from four important features of these protected bicycle lanes.

- **Decreased Avenue crossing distance:** Protected bicycle lanes include pedestrian refuge areas that, in essence, reduce pedestrian Avenue crossing distance by between 25% and 40%;
- **“Traffic Calming” slower vehicle speeds by narrowing driving lanes:** Studies indicate that a reduction in the width of a vehicle travel lane leads to slower speeds and reduced crashes. The creation of protected bicycle lanes typically includes reducing vehicle travel lanes from 12’ or 11’ to 10’.
- **Separated vehicle and bicycle lanes with a buffer zone:** The bicycle lane is typically separated from the moving vehicles by the floating parking area (usually 8’ to 10’ wide) and a buffer zone (usually 3’ to 5’ wide, except at turning lanes);
- **Split phase left turn signals:** NYC DOT reports Citywide (6th Avenue data is not available) both that most pedestrian/vehicle street crossing crashes occur while vehicles are turning (pedestrians have a walk sign) and that – by a 3 to 1 ratio – occur more at left turns than right turns. Many of the protected bicycle lanes, including most of the 9th Avenue protected bicycle lanes, include split phases for left turning vehicles (separate times for turning vehicles and crossing pedestrians/bicyclists).

Unfortunately, many of these above safety features have been substantially reduced in the initially proposed 6th Avenue parking protected bicycle lane between West 14th and 33rd Streets.

The current proposal by DOT for a protected 6th Avenue Bicycle lane includes:

- Reducing three of the four travel lanes from 11’ to 10’;
- Reducing the width of the Parking Lane to 8’ from 9’ and putting it just east of the bicycle lane and buffer zone (rather than just east of the sidewalk), creating a “floating” parking lane;
- Increasing the bicycle lane from 5’ wide to 6’ wide and creating a 3’ buffer zone;
- Installing painted, non-landscaped pedestrian islands approximately 12’ long by 10’ wide, including a refuge area of 4’ by 8’
- Install Split Phase left turn signals at both West 14th Street and West 23rd Street that enables bicycles and pedestrian to cross on the west side of those streets without turning vehicles and provides a separate bicycle and turning lane up to the pedestrian crossing line.
- Install “Mixing Zones” at other left turn corners where vehicles and bicyclists share a wider, approximately 15’ wide area, buffered by the other three travel lanes by an approximately 3’ buffer.

The above proposal lacks several key features that enable the reductions in crashes, injuries and fatalities required to achieve “Vision Zero.” More specifically, we request that DOT’s revised proposal include the following elements or acceptable alternatives:

- **A minimum 6' wide raised and/or landscaped pedestrian refuge area:** The current proposal includes just a 4' pedestrian refuge area. Particularly at turning lanes, this does not provide sufficient space for more than one or two pedestrians, particularly if there is someone in a wheelchair.

DOT indicated that the pedestrian refuge space is not wide enough to enable a raised area or any landscaping. The committee recommended narrowing the bicycle lane to 4' and using that extra space to expand the pedestrian refuge area to enable both a raised area and landscaping, which DOT indicated was not feasible because the Sanitation Department requires a minimum of 11' clearance (including both buffer zone and bicycle lane) for their cleaning of the bicycle lane. However, we have heard that the Sanitation Department has begun purchasing cleaning machines that can work within a narrower area, thus enabling the expansion to 6' pedestrian refuge area;

- **Installation of split phase signals on all left turn (from 6th Avenue) streets along the enclosed bicycle lane:** We appreciate that DOT's proposal includes split phase left turn signals on West 14th and West 23rd Streets, the streets with the highest number of crashes (from 2009 to 2013, 65 and 52, respectively). However, 6 other intersections each had over 30 crashes between 2009 and 2013. In fact 66% of the injuries that occurred in the West 14th to West 33rd Street corridor along 6th Avenue occurred on those other intersections. DOT explained their decision to limit the split phase to two intersections based on their concern that the split phase shortens the time for both pedestrian/bicycle crossing and vehicle turning.

In our experience with other split phases along 9th Avenue and 8th Avenue, the shortened times do not create a severe burden. DOT's data from other protected bicycle corridors indicate injury and fatality reductions of approximately 50%, as compared to 20% to 30% in corridors without split phases. When the goal is "Vision Zero," we feel some inconvenience from shortened crossing and turning times is warranted.

In addition, the creation of the split phase turn signals will also permit DOT to maintain a separate bicycle lane through to the pedestrian cross walk, rather than the proposed "mixed zones."

In addition, we also request that DOT outreach to the businesses along 6th Avenue to hear their concerns and to alert them to potentially alter their delivery times or to make other adjustments. The proposal would create a loss of approximately 42 delivery spaces (DOT has indicated that the lost spots are in "No Standing Except Trucks Loading or Unloading (3 hour)" during the day zones).

We also request that DOT collect and report additional data that can assist DOT, Community Boards and other policy makers to better understand which features of the enclosed bicycle lanes are most useful in reducing crashes, injuries and fatalities. This should include data on “mixed zones,” specific traffic counts for any streets they judge to not be feasible for split phases, and more specifics on the crashes that do occur.

As always, we appreciate both the emphasis on plans to better achieve “Vision Zero” and the partnership of DOT as they plan protected bicycle lanes and other safety enhancing measures.

Sincerely,



Christine Berthet
Chair



Ernest Modarelli
Co-Chair, Transportation
Planning Committee



Jay Marcus
Co-Chair, Transportation
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